

HUMANITIES SEMINARS PROGRAM

Has the United States Become an Empire?

Fall 2017

Friday, 10am-12pm

Class Location: Rubel Room, Poetry Center

Offered by the University of Arizona

Instructor: David N. Gibbs, Professor of History, dgibbs@arizona.edu

Since the ending of the Cold War, the United States has been widely viewed as an imperial power, in the sense of having a truly global level of influence, with no peer. Instead of colonies, the United States possesses hundreds of military bases throughout the world, whether for better or worse. The "imperial" characterization is now accepted by both supporters and critics of official policy. This class will evaluate the genesis of the US empire, beginning with the Cold War in the late 1940s and extending through more recent conflicts with Serbia, post-communist Russia, and elements of the Islamic world.

Throughout the class, there will be an emphasis on conflicting interpretations of US policy, particularly with regard to the motives of US policymakers. In the section on the Vietnam War, for example, students will be encouraged to consider *why* the United States acted as it did; to evaluate several potential explanations for U.S. actions in Vietnam; and to decide which of these possible explanations seems most plausible.

Required text:

Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007.

Class Announcements

September 15

Interpreting International Relations

Layne, *Peace of Illusions*, chap. 1.

September 22

Competing Perspectives on the Origins of the Cold War

Layne, *Peace of Illusions*, chaps. 2, 3.

September 29

NSC-68 and the Korean War

Layne, *Peace of Illusions*, chap. 4.

US Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Justification for US Military Intervention in Cuba," March 13, 1962, recently declassified, from the National Security Archives, Washington, DC.

October 13

Covert Operations and the Cold War

Arindrajit Dube, Ethan Kaplan, and Suresh Naidu, "Coups, Corporations, and Classified Information," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 126, no. 3, 2011.

October 27

Vietnam and the Politics of Defeat

Layne, *Peace of Illusions*, chaps. 7, 8.

November 3

The "Vietnam Syndrome" during the 1970s

John Rosenberg, "The Quest against Détente: Eugene Rostow, the October War, and the Origins of the Anti-Détente Movement, 1969-1976," *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 4, 2015.

November 17

The Reagan Doctrine

David N. Gibbs, "Reassessing Soviet Motives for Invading Afghanistan: A Declassified History," *Critical Asian Studies* 38, no. 2, 2006.

December 1

The Rise of Humanitarian Intervention

Alan J. Kuperman, "Rwanda in Retrospect: A Hard Look at Intervention," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2000.

December 8

The War on Terror

Layne, *Peace of Illusions*, chap. 6.

December 15

US Relations with Post-Communist Russia

Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shifrinson, "Deal or No Deal: The End of the Cold War and the US Offer to Limit NATO Expansion," *International Security* 40, no. 4, 2016.